

*Celebrating Success*



**2009  
2nd Annual  
Starfish Thrower  
Awards**

*January 15, 2009*

*Little America Hotel  
Cheyenne, WY*



Wyoming  
Department  
of Health

**“I Made a Difference to That One.”**

## Starfish Award Winners

### Person in Recovery from Substance Abuse:

**Javier Maldonado** entered treatment at Curran-Seeley's Spanish Language Program after a DUI conviction. He was the first graduate of that program which itself received a Starfish Throwers Award last year. Throughout treatment, Mr. Maldonado began making noticeable changes, which was evidence of his desire for recovery. He began volunteering at the DUI Victim Impact Panel and as a speaker, tells his story as a drunk driver and the consequences associated with his behavior.

At this time, Mr. Maldonado has three years and three months of sobriety; and as one of the pioneers of the Spanish Language Treatment Program, he and other group members started a Spanish speaking AA group. He reports that he never intended to hurt his wife, children, and loved ones and is thankful to the Teton County court system and law enforcement for giving him the chance of recovery.

### Person in Recovery from Mental Illness:

**Dallas Curry** is a peer specialist employed by Peak Wellness Center in Laramie to work with persons suffering from mental illness. Dallas has made his life an example of the difference one person can make. He is a compassionate mentor and a courageous advocate.

Dallas' willingness to share his story opens the door for others to have hope, to gain awareness, and to reduce the overwhelming burden of discrimination that plagues those who may struggle with having a mental illness. Dallas demonstrates on a daily basis the courage, wisdom, and ability to articulate insight, which allows both consumers and professionals to learn from his cumulative experiences.

## Outstanding Public Servant:

**Judge Haws** played a pivotal role in the development and on-going success of the Sublette County Treatment Court; a client-centered, strength based therapeutic drug court funded solely through the County. Team members who nominated him praised Judge Haws for his leadership role with the Treatment Court. The Sublette County Treatment Court Program Evaluation for this year states “All team members attribute stability of the program and positive changes in FY07-08 to the effective leadership of Judge Haws.”

Judge Haws utilizes best practices from a System of Care Wraparound model which assures individualized, culturally competent practices; holding offenders accountable, while also recognizing natural consequences and individual strengths in people. He has brought the most innovative and humane approaches to serving those with addiction issues in the most frontier areas of Wyoming. His dedication has proven to be a successful effort in improving the lives and the communities in Sublette County.

## Community Coalitions:

Wyoming is struggling with ways to provide earlier and more effective interventions for children and families. With high drop-out rates, out-of-home placements, and children in need of mental health services, **Albany County SAGE** has stepped up to address these issues by implementing a community Systems of Care approach. Albany County Sage asks at-risk families what they need and assists them in meeting those needs. This model program coordinates existing services and works to provide other services so that child and family needs are met in the community. With a small staff and a coalition of volunteers, they assist families to believe in their own strengths. Public and private entities serve on committees within the site, joining forces to strengthen families who in turn strengthen the community.

**SAGE West** in Teton County is a community coalition that has integrated the work of a number of agencies and programs to meet the needs of children and families, developing a system of care integrating the efforts of multiple local and state programs.

SAGE West has dealt successfully with the unique challenges of serving low income families who work and attend school in Jackson, but cannot afford to live there. Many working families must live 90 minutes south of Jackson and commute, regardless of the weather; and most necessarily work two jobs (and sometimes three) just to make ends meet. The children of the working families commute to Jackson with their parents to attend school. SAGE West works to meet the needs of these families rather than requiring the families to meet the needs and schedules of the programs. This program is seen as a model for other Wyoming communities.

### **Mental Health Therapist:**

**Wendy Wiecki** facilitates Sex Offender Group, Sex Offender Issues Group, Trauma and Recovery Group and Substance Abuse Group on Dorm Four of the Wyoming Boys' School in Worland. Since 1994, Ms. Wiecki has focused her skills and treatment approach to serve high risk students placed at this facility by the courts. Her treatment does not stop with her students. Ms. Wiecki is often involved in therapy sessions with the student's family and victims. These sessions are for all involved and clear the path for reunification and re-entry into the student's home and home community.

The students Ms. Wiecki serves are often products of extreme abuse and neglect. Her caring and confident approach to treatment provides students with the tools they need to accept responsibility for their past crimes; additionally, it allows them to feel safe and secure enough to disclose and process their own abuse issues in a warm and caring environment.

## **Substance Abuse Therapist:**

**Dr. James Haller** has tirelessly devoted his life to helping others. He consistently responds to those who find themselves in need of assistance in their attempts to overcome their addictions. He has stepped up to help not only in his local arena, but throughout the State. Helping to start the DePaul Hospital's Chemical Dependency Program was a rewarding experience for Dr. Haller. He has contributed significantly to expanding the AA program in this community, has volunteered to oversee the Wyoming Professionals Assistance Program for many years, and continues to serve those in need. There were several instances when parties called needing his help when he dropped everything, got in his airplane, and transported them to an intensive treatment facility out of state. It was the only facility equipped to assist these individuals and Dr. Haller willingly sacrificed his time and resources to help them. This is just one example of his dedication to the program he so diligently supports. For over 30 years he has unselfishly given his time, energy, emotional, and financial resources to help those with addictions.

## **Advocate:**

**Leon Chamberlain** became a Veterans Advocate in November of 2007. This pilot program, funded by the Department of Health and managed by the Wyoming Military Department, was established to assist veterans and their families on issues surrounding service to their nation. Leon played a major role in creating the program and in convincing the Legislature to fund it.

Since he began, Leon has sought out over 400 service members and has met with service members in every community in Wyoming. Out of his own pocket he purchased a small van because he did not want a simple detail like lodging hampering his efforts. Sometimes, even in the worst Wyoming weather, he can be seen criss-crossing Wyoming on his Harley, a tool he uses to connect with service members. It is hard not to engage in conversation with a Harley riding counselor!

A member of the Wyoming Army National Guard, Leon volunteered to deploy for one year beginning in April of 2009. He did not have to volunteer; and when asked why he did so, he responded that service members are his family and how does he best serve his family if he is not able to completely relate to their service, something he believes is only fully achieved by accompanying them to war.

## Outstanding Program:

The **Fremont County Alcohol Crisis Center** is a non-profit, social detoxification facility which has been in existence since October of 2000. Initially, the Center operated on a federal grant. The City of Riverton and the Fremont County Commissioners have both contributed significantly to the Center. For the past five years, the Wyoming Department of Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division, has been the primary funding source for the Center.

Services provided include social detoxification with medical monitoring, pre-treatment education, short-term transitional housing, 12-Step programming, 24- hour sober support, and court ordered breathalyzers. The Crisis Center continues to make a difference in peoples' lives and in the community. Numerous clients have maintained their sobriety for more than one year and several for up to eight years since admission at the Center. Many who maintain their sobriety have furthered their education as well as become successfully employed and productive citizens of the community. Many former clients have also regained the custody of their children after a period of continued sobriety.

## Outstanding Youth:

**Megan Kelly** is only 16 years-old but Schizophrenia has been a part of her life since she was eight. Megan's brother has childhood onset schizophrenia, paranoid subtype. Megan is not only a strong advocate for her brother, but also works hard to advocate for everyone with a mental illness. Megan is a member of N.A.M.I. (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) and is also on the Board of Directors of her local N.A.M.I. affiliate.

Megan has worked to educate classmates and teachers to make them aware of what Schizophrenia. She has done this through writing essays, handing information to anyone who is confused, misinformed or just has no idea what mental illness is all about. Megan raises awareness because she has witnessed first hand how often mental illness is misunderstood and how that has affected her brother, and her family. Megan wants to help erase stigma so that it can benefit everyone. She also plans to continue her education in the field of Psychology after graduating from high school.

## Parent in Recovery:

**Ms. Viola Antelope** spent years in an abusive marriage; but through work with counselors at With Eagles Wings Counseling Service on the Wind River Indian Reservation (WRIR), Viola has kept her family together and brought them into counseling as well.

When her divorce was finalized last fall, Viola retained custody of her two natural children, as well as three younger adopted children. Although there was no provision for child support for the three younger children, one of whom has extensive medical and mental health issues, Viola works full-time and is managing to support the family unit.

Viola's recovery has benefited not only her immediate family, but also youth across the WRIR. Through her role as a co-advisor with the Wind River Reservation UNITY Council, a local tribal youth group, Viola inspires countless teens to live a healthy lifestyle by setting the example herself.

## Special Recognition:

**John McMahan** retired on August 31, 2008 after 41 years of service at Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center, most recently as its Executive Director since 1987. Serving youth and adults suffering from mild to serious mental illness and substance abuse disorders, Northern was one of the first multi-county comprehensive mental health centers in Wyoming.

John first joined Northern in Buffalo as county manager and clinician in 1967, charged with establishing an out-patient mental health service in Johnson County. John served the rural population with dedication, often traveling to the far reaches of Johnson County or remaining in the office during evening hours to provide marriage and family counseling services. He provided those services in the Sheridan and Gillette offices, as well, all the while fulfilling his managerial and program development responsibilities for Johnson County.

As awareness of the need for mental health services grew, John helped to develop programs to serve that need, and in 1981, he was promoted to program director for the five counties then served by Northern. In 1987, John was selected to lead the organization as its Executive Director.

John played an important part in shaping mental health services across the State, regularly volunteering to pilot new projects. He was always willing to take the risk if it meant Northern would be able to help a brooder population or better serve existing clients. His colleagues describe him as a kind and compassionate soul with a comprehensive knowledge of a deep commitment to mental health services.

### **Special Recognition:**

The **Board of Central Wyoming Counseling and its executive director Mike Huston** opened a new facility in Casper, Wyoming; broadening state's capacity to provide substance abuse treatment. This could not have been done without the active support of the Governor, the state legislature, the Wyoming Department of Health, and the Casper community. Many other organizations and individuals were involved throughout the process. This Starfish Award is in recognition of all of their efforts.

Casper City officials and the Tate Foundation recognized community problems, it's strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in services in Casper. The Community Facilitation Initiative, a group of 19 concerned/interested citizens, that worked with professional facilitators hired to conduct a series of meetings and interviews with a wide variety of community agencies. Casper Police Chief Tom Pagel hosted a series of meetings with community partners including representatives from foundations in Casper as well as the Daniels Fund from Denver. The McMurry Foundation, Neil and Doris McMurry, The Daniels Fund, and City of Casper, and Central Wyoming Counseling Center, the Martin Family Foundation, Zimmerman Foundation, Wyoming Community Foundation, First Interstate Bank and Foundation, Well Fargo Bank, The True Family Foundation, Town of Mills, Wyoming, Town of Evansville, Wyoming, Goodstein Foundation, Blue Envelope Health Fund, Kinskey Foundation all made financial contributions towards the project.

The community and these contributors provided the dollars to build the facility; the taxpayers of the state, through the support of the legislature, provided the funds to operate it. The board and staff of Central Wyoming Counseling provide the direction and hard work to make certain it makes a difference in the lives of those who suffer from addiction and their families.